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CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of providing adjustable rate usage-based billing for data services, said method comprising:

billing for data services at a current level billing rate over a current level billing period;

determining an average actual usage rate over the current level billing period upon its expiration;

if the absolute value of the percentage difference between the current level billing rate and the average actual usage rate is less than a maximum adjustment, then setting a new level billing rate for a next level billing period equal to the average actual usage rate, otherwise setting the new level billing rate equal to the current billing rate plus a percentage of the current billing rate equal to the maximum adjustment if the difference between the current level billing rate and the average actual usage rate is greater than 1, and set the new level billing rate equal to the current billing rate less a percentage of the current billing rate equal to the maximum adjustment if the difference between the current level billing rate and the average actual usage rate is less than 1;

establishing the current level billing rate as the new level billing rate and the next level billing period as the current level billing period; and

repeating said determining an average actual usage rate, said setting a new level billing rate and said establishing for each current level billing period upon its expiration.

2. The method of Claim 1 further comprising computing a carryover cost for the next level billing period equal to the difference between the actual average rate of the current level billing period and the new level billing rate for the next level billing period.

3. The method of Claim 2 wherein said determining an average actual usage rate further comprises:

computing an actual cost per each billing cycle of the expired current level billing period and averaging the actual cost for each billing cycle over the total number of billing cycles in the expired current level billing period; and

adding the average actual cost per billing cycle to the carryover cost per billing cycle for the current level billing period.

4. The method of Claim 4 wherein the maximum adjustment is increased if the absolute value of the difference between the current level billing rate and the actual usage rate is greater than some predetermined value.

5. The method of Claim 1 wherein the maximum adjustment is increased if the absolute value of the difference between the current level billing rate and the actual usage rate is greater than some predetermined value.
6. The method of Claim 1 wherein an initial current level billing rate is based on a customer's estimates of network usage and usage rates established by a provider of the data services.
7. The method of Claim 6 wherein the usage rates vary based on zones in which customer data sites are located.
8. The method of Claim 7 wherein the usage rates vary further based on what class of service is used between pairs of customer data sites.
9. The method of Claim 1 wherein the number of billing cycles comprising a level billing period are decreased if the absolute value of the difference between the current level billing rate and the actual usage rate is greater than some predetermined value.
10. The method of Claim 1 wherein the average actual usage rate is determined based on actual data services usage and usage rates established by a provider of the data services.
11. The method of Claim 10 wherein the usage rates vary based on zones in which customer data sites are located.

12. The method of Claim 11 wherein the usage rates vary further based on what class of service is used between pairs of customer data sites.